

Sunday 6 December 2020

Mark 1:1-8

This goes to congregations at North Hillingdon, Hayes and Hayes End. If you get it by post and have an email, then tell me so next time we can email you and save a stamp.

You can keep in touch via the church websites (www.hayesmethodistchurch.co.uk, www.hemc.org.uk, www.northhillingdonmethodistchurch.org) and Facebook:

- www.facebook.com/hayesmethodistchurch
 - www.facebook.com/hayesendmethodistchurch
 - www.facebook.com/northhillingdonmethodistchurch
- A video for Sunday will be on each website and Facebook.*

Each church also has a WhatsApp group. If you want to join it then let me know.

Face-to-face services take place in all three churches this Sunday. Ken is leading worship in North Hillingdon at 9.30 am and at Hayes End at 11.00 am, whilst Deacon Claire Gill is at Hayes for their 11.00 am service. Please come if you feel safe and confident to do so. For others, the Circuit Zoom Service starts at 10.45 am.

Uncovering Joy

(Mark 1:1-8)

If you venture out in the late afternoon or evening when it's dark you'll see Christmas decorations on display in people's homes. People have unearthed the tinsel and baubles, and hung the Christmas lights inside and out. After the year we have had, there is a real desire to enjoy the excitement and thrill of Christmas – to bring a bit of joy into life. And how can blame them (and us)?

Christmas is a time of joy. The angels announced to the shepherds, "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people ..." (Luke 2:10)

Unlike Luke and Matthew's Gospels, Mark doesn't have an account of Jesus' birth. But the joy is there in the very first verse – "the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God". It's what I would describe as a Ronseal statement – doing exactly what it says on the tin.

But if you start with those words, then what follows is rather strange. Because Jesus isn't

mentioned (not until verse 9 that is). Instead, we hear about John the Baptist.

How strange ... where is the joy in the wilderness where John the Baptist can be found? Where is the joy in a man clothed in camel's hair, who dines on locust and wild honey?

But the joy of Christmas isn't necessarily an easy fix, turned on with the flick of a switch.

John is a messenger going ahead to prepare the way for joy.

Joy needs to be sought, joy needs to be nurtured. People were travelling into the wilderness to find out the good news from John the Baptist, to have their sins dealt with. But, if you live in Jerusalem why would you head out into a barren landscape when you had the Temple around the corner, whose whole purpose was to deal with sin?

The wilderness becomes a place of flight, of struggle, of lostness and of hunger. But it is also a place of new beginnings. The people of Jerusalem were being baptized in the river Jordan, confessing their sins and receiving forgiveness – joy.

Think of the Israelites in the book of Exodus. They travelled into the wilderness, and through the journey they were formed as the people of God – what joy.

Joy is not easy to achieve to easy. It can take time and effort.

The news of a falling rate of infection, the news of a vaccine starting to be rolled out is a cause for joy. But the struggle to get there has been hard, it has cost livelihoods and lives. It has been a struggle and we will need to struggle a while longer. But joy is there.

Michaelangelo described the process of making a sculpture in these words: "The sculpture is already complete within the marble block before I start my work. It is already there, I just have to chisel away the superfluous material." But it is not easy, it takes time and effort.

To uncover joy can take time and effort too, but we are rewarded with the greatest gift – of joy and assurance found in the Christ child who loves and will save the world.

How can we be bringers of joy, like Mark (and John) who proclaimed the good news? How can we be angels of joy, like the angels who revealed glad tidings to the shepherds? The good news is that half the job is done for us – people need joy in their life now more than ever, and they are searching for it.

It is up to us to respond. But we need to do it with sensitivity and integrity. It isn't a quick fix with a couple of Hallelujahs thrown in for good measure. Finding joy in the pain of life can be a struggle: it is like walking through the wilderness, it is like hacking away stone to find the sculpture within. But the time taken and the effort expended is well spent. It is a peace like no other, it is joy without compare. It is love that lasts, that won't disappear or be packed in a cupboard come January. And this is the good news of Jesus Christ that Mark proclaims.

Advent Prayer

On the second Sunday in Advent, we light the candle of joy in our Advent Ring. Why not light a candle in your home this week, with these words:

God is with us, alleluia. Come to save us, alleluia. In the darkness, we light a candle of joy, knowing that the good news of Jesus is our rock in the struggles of life.

Holy God, as we light this candle, help us to rejoice that your coming is good news for us and for the world.

Yet his light shall shine from our lives, Spirit blazing, as we touch the flame of his holy fire.

Watching and Waiting

The London Methodist District has produced a short Advent course for small groups or personal Bible study. You should have received a copy.

On Thursdays at 7.30 pm, there is a zoom group looking at the material together. Join by clicking: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82743382281?pwd=QUYxbkNmWHNBKzRoQnBzRVBwdWR2Zz09>
Meeting ID: 827 4338 2281, Passcode: 122020

Sunday's Circuit Zoom Service

The Circuit Zoom service starts at 10.45 am led by local preacher Peter Davies. To join in, go to: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82702540378?pwd=Wxo2WGVnVXR1SGdlZTNqVGFZRURyZz09>

Meeting ID: 827 0254 0378, Passcode: 947280

You can also join the service through your phone.

1. Dial 020 3481 5237 or 020 3051 2874.
2. Enter meeting ID (see above) then # key
3. You will be asked to enter your participants ID. Ignore this, and just press # key
4. Enter the password (see above) then the # key.

Sunday on the BBC

8.10 am Sunday Worship Radio 4 (93.5FM)
Cities of Promise: a place for nature –exploring the biblical view of a redeemed city, a place of beauty and worship of the living God.

11.30 am Sunday Worship BBC 1
The Revd Alan Miller leads a service for the Second Sunday in Advent from the Church of the Holy Rude in Stirling, Scotland.

1.15 pm Songs of Praise BBC 1
The final of BBC Young Chorister of the Year with judges John Rutter, Laura Wright and Carl Jackson.

God's Story. Your Story. Every Story.

This week's story of faith, transformation, hope, repentance, healing and forgiveness is from the Revd Lynita Conradie, the minister at Eastcote, Cannon Lane and Pinner. Lynita shares her experience of 'walking by faith, not by sight'.

Listen on Saturday at 5.30 pm on medium wave 1305, 1332, 1413 and 1566, as well as on DAB digital radio or Freeview 725. You can hear past stories at www.methodistlondon.org.uk/woven-and-premier-radio-series.

Bible passages for future Sundays

13 December – John 1:6-8, 19-28; 1 Thessal 5:16-24
20 December – Luke 1:26-38; Romans 16:25-27

Take care, stay safe and God bless,

Rev Ken

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